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ABSTRACT

The Rural Transition Teacher Preparation Project was designed to train rural special educators to be clinical instructors for the University of Utah's Department of Special Education. These trained educators then serve as delivery agents of courses designed to improve transition services to mildly and moderately handicapped students in rural areas. Each clinical instructor receives on-campus training and practical experience in the area of secondary transition services. They are then able to train rural junior and senior high school teachers in methods to improve transition programming, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, and use of community agencies. The transition training model's instructional foundation is based on seven steps: (1) determining the need for the skills, (2) determining student strengths and weaknesses, (3) motivating the student to learn, (4) modeling and rehearsing the skill, (5) providing guided practice, (6) arranging practical practice, and (7) monitoring generalization. (A job skills checklist is included.) (JDD)

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MEETING TRANSITION NEEDS OF THE MILDLY HANDICAPPED IN RURAL AREAS: PERSONNEL AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Providing training to special education teachers in rural areas is a considerable challenge for rural school districts and universities. Sparse populations and remoteness can create a sense of professional isolation for teachers outside major population centers. In Utah, the University of Utah Department of Special Education is attempting to meet this challenge through the implementation of several federally-funded projects designed to meet rural teacher training needs.

One of these is the Rural Transition Teacher Preparation Project (RTTPP), initiated in 1986. The mission of this project has been to train a group of rural special educators to be clinical instructors for the Special Education Department. In this capacity these educators serve as delivery agents of courses designed to improve transition services to mildly and moderately handicapped students in rural areas. Each Clinical Instructor receives on-campus training and practical experience in the area of secondary transition services. They are then able to train rural junior and senior high school teachers in methods to improve transition programming, including curriculum, instruction, assessment, and use of community agencies.

This field-based delivery system has greatly improved the department's ability to provide training to special education teachers in remote areas of the state. It has also helped to reduce the professional isolation felt by rural special educators. The Rural Transition Teacher Preparation Project currently augments the masters degree program in transition services and rural certification programs offered by the Special Education Department.

The Training Model

The most familiar transition training models were developed for teachers of the severely handicapped, therefore, a somewhat different model was utilized to accommodate teachers of mild/moderate handicapped. It is a variation on Wehman's Three Stage Vocational Transition Model (1984) which separates services into 1) an input and foundation stage which is essentially secondary school curriculum and instruction, 2) a process stage in which a transition plan is developed, and 3) an employment outcome stage in which the student is placed in a job. The remainder of this paper will be used to describe stage 1 elements of the transition model as used in the RTTPP project to deliver functional, integrated, community-based instruction to secondary mildly and moderately handicapped students.

The Instructional Foundation

Part of the formula for success in any educational program is having clear, effective instructional procedures (Hosford, 1984). They can provide the base out of which the

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curriculum can grow. For purposes of teaching functional transition skills, a seven-step model is suggested. It is patterned after a set of instructional procedures that has been validated by Deshler, Alley, Warner, & Schumaker (1981) as a critical component of the Strategies Intervention Model (SIM).

Step 1: Determining the Need for the Skills

If teachers are to provide instruction in functional transition skills, they first must determine which skills will receive the highest priority for instruction. This is the initial step of the instructional procedure. Important functional skills can be found by continuously assessing the local environment and identifying specific tasks that are required for successful job performance (Wehman, 1984). Figure 1 shows an example of a job skills checklist that can be used for this assessment. Specific functional skills are grouped under the subject category by which it is addressed in the school program. These correspond to skill areas typically found in school districts' core curricula. When modifying a handicapped student's program, it is a simple matter to place functional skills in the context of subjects commonly taught in regular classes. Once a number of checklists have been collected from various community employers, common skills can be identified.

An IEP team can use this information to match a student's occupational preferences with skills actually used in those occupations. Since few high school students have a clear vision of their ultimate vocation, and since transition often means changing from one occupation to another, it is in the students' best interest to be provided with skills that are transferable within and among a variety of occupations (Greenan, 1987). Collection of checklist information is also a good "foot in the door" with employers who might agree to accept students for on-site training.

Figure 1

JOB SKILLS CHECKLIST

Instructions: Check those behaviors that pertain to successful performance in your work setting:

LISTENING

___ receiving oral directions ___ taking phone messages

___ attendance at staff meetings ___ receiving intercom messages

Specific examples: _____

_____

Other skills: _____

READING

___ manuals ___ reports ___ written directions

___ magazines/journals/newspapers ___ computer programs

Specific examples: _____

_____

Other skills: _____

WRITING

___ reports ___ business letters ___ memos

Specific examples: _____

Other skills: _____

SPEAKING

___ giving directions to others ___ asking questions

___ participation at staff meetings ___ oral reports

___ conversation with customers ___ formal presentations

Specific examples: _____

_____

Other skills: _____

MATHEMATICS

___ calculating ___ estimating ___ measurement

Specific examples: _____

_____

Other skills: _____

THINKING

Describe specific occasions when an employee might be required to do problem solving and/or creative thinking. Use examples from the past if you wish.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Describe specific occasions when an employee is required to engage in social interaction. Think not only of routine socialization but also challenging social situations.

Step 2: Determining Student Strengths and Weaknesses

It is unfair to assume that the existence of a handicapping condition automatically means failure to perform functional skills. Once a locally valid functional curriculum has been identified, it is necessary to see if students are indeed deficient in these areas.

The goal of this step is to have students perform task similar to ones required in a setting relevant to the student. For example, if a student has expressed an interest in retail sales and/or office clerical work, a needed skill might be completing forms such as sales tickets, inventory control sheets, or order forms. A pre-test activity might involve having the student read selected forms and fill them in with information provided. Results of the activity would then be analyzed and communicated to the students.

Step 3: Motivating the Student to Learn

Lack of motivation and general disaffection with school is an educational albatross for many low achievers. In contrast, it is generally acknowledged that adult learners do not depend on extrinsic reinforcers to motivate them to learn. Rather, their motivation is primarily internal; it emamates from the desire to meet a felt need (Knowles, 1970). Since transition means considering the approaching adulthood of students, it seems reasonable to apply some adult learning principles to them. Perhaps students should feel the need to learn before being expected to put effort into it. There should at least be an attempt on the part of teachers to create a purpose for learning.

Results of the Job Skills Checklist can be used at this point to demonstrate to students what skills are important in the eyes of potential employers. Students are often surprised at how often the same skill will be required across several divergent types of businesses. A student who has had little interest in learning to write because he expects to enter a blue collar trade might suddenly find that writing plays an important role in being promoted in many of the companies he is interested in working for. It is not uncommon to find supervisors, foremen, or personnel directors from local businesses who are willing to speak to classes about specific jobs and the range of skills needed to do them. Getting this information directly from the job source can mean more to the disaffected student than hearing it from a teacher.

The ultimate goal of this step is to have the student explain why a given skill is important for him or her to learn. Students will be expected to "master" this step. This means that if a student cannot give a rationale for learning, the teacher will wait until he or she can before continuing with instruction. This probably seems unreasonable in light of some students' persistent apathy about learning. But unless motivation is addressed openly and becomes part of the teaching routine, it is unlikely that students will feel any incentive to change poor attitudes. It also prevents the teacher from automatically assuming that students are unmotivated.

Step 4: Describe/Model/Rehearse the Skill

The teacher will, of course, be required to actively present the skills using appropriate instructional techniques. A useful sequence is as follows: first, describe the skill, orienting the student to what is expected; second, model or demonstrate the skill, showing specifically how it can be applied to a variety of situations; third, rehearse the skill, involving students in naming the steps and substeps. A structured approach is suggested in which teachers: 1) proceed in small steps but at a brisk pace, 2) give detailed and redundant explanations, 3) provide many examples, 4) ask and elicit a large number of questions, 5) correctly model the skill, 6) repeat the material until students understand (Rosenshine, 1983).

Step 5: Provide guided practice

Classroom-based practice follows the skill description. The objective is to have students apply the skill to certains tasks within a controlled environment. The assumption here is that professional teachers are better capable of facilitating student mastery of certain functional skills than are employers. This is especially true of job-related academic skills which are prerequisites to adequate functioning in just about any job (Diehl & Mikulecky, 1980).

The uniqueness of this step comes in the application of "naturalistic", or functional, outcomes that more closely parallel occupational applications of skills learned in school. Figure 2 contrasts some skill applications in school and in occupations.

Figure 2

Learning and Teaching in School and Real Life

	Learning in School	Learning in Life
Math	-all information present	-information lacking
Writing	-creative -for teachers	-instrumental -for a variety of audiences
Reading	-textbook dominant	-various forms of print a graphics
Speaking	-controlled by formal conventions	-controlled by common courtesy
Instruction	-formal -classroom-based -large group -reading/listening intensive -language-based outcomes	-informal -workplace-based -individual/small group -listening/watching intensive -performance-based outcomes

For example, it might have been determined in step 1 that writing skills are needed for a variety of jobs. Use of the Job Skills Checklist has even provided a list of specific writing

tasks that entry-level employees would be asked to perform. One of these might be writing inter-office memos. Language Arts classes deal with writing skills but the desired outcomes are usually well crafted paragraphs, themes, and essays. Learning these skills are certainly useful but they don't necessarily get to the heart of the matter for low-achieving students. For these students, more time needs to be spent applying basic writing skills to functional outcomes.

Once it has been demonstrated that a student cannot write memos (Step 2) and that the student can explain why this skill should be learned (Step 3), a technique for writing that can be applied to memos will be introduced (Step 4). Then, in Step 5, the student will be given memo-writing practice under the watchful eye of the teacher in the presumably safe, predictable, and nurturing environment of the classroom where mistakes should be encouraged, corrections should be constructive, and feedback should be plentiful and positive.

Step 6: Arrange Practical Practice

Once mastery has been demonstrated in Step 5, students will be placed at job sites to practice and generalize skills in the often-times unsafe, unpredictable, competitive environment of the workplace where mistakes can be costly, corrections can be an annoyance, and feedback can be perfunctory or negative. Instead of being put in the position to actually teach skills, employers are asked to monitor and custom-fit classroom-acquired skills to the particular demands and standards of the business. Employers engage in oversight and perfomance appraisal of on-site trainees rather than in direct instruction.

Step 7: Monitor Generalization

The final instructional step involves collecting follow-up data regarding long-term use of functional skills. Students will continue to be placed in community-referenced sites in order to refine work adjustment skills. Placements will be changed periodically to allow students opportunities to adjust generic skills to particular workplaces. Concurrently, students will receive classroom instruction in lower priority skills.

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